
HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD STAFF REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION

Landmark/District:	Jessie Reno School Restoration and Addition	<input type="checkbox"/> Agenda
Address:	4820 Howard Street, NW	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Consent Calendar
Meeting Date:	July 26, 2012	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Alteration
Case Number:	12-497	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Addition
Staff Reviewer:	Andrew Lewis	<input type="checkbox"/> Demolition
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Conceptual Design

On November 17, 2011, the Historic Preservation Review Board approved the conceptual design for the proposed restoration of the historic Jesse Reno School and the construction of a new classroom addition. Review of the restoration and design details were delegated to staff. Since that time, budgetary constraints have required a significant reduction in the size and scale of the proposed addition, but the basic design approach remains the same. The restoration work proposed within Reno itself is largely unchanged, the smaller new addition will be located in the previously approved location on the rear of the historic school, and a “hyphen” element will be used to connect the two buildings. The revised concept is being resubmitted primarily to alert the Board to the change in scope of the project.

Reno School

The two-story vernacular Reno School was designed by Washington DC’s first Municipal Architect, Snowden Ashford, and constructed in 1903. It served students from the predominately African-American neighborhood known as Reno City that once stood near the present day school. Reno School was closed in 1950 and has since suffered from water damage and a general lack of maintenance but, overall, the building retains a high degree of integrity and is structurally sound.

Restoration and Alteration

As before, the majority of Reno’s significant interior spaces will be rehabilitated to serve as classroom space. The first floor’s main hall and its “pinwheel” layout formed by radiating classrooms and stairways will be preserved, repaired and restored. The exposed structural systems in the classrooms, original doors, trim and other historic fabric will also be retained or replaced in-kind. Alterations will be limited primarily to the first floor cloak rooms which are being converted to serve as utility and restroom spaces. A new central skylight will also be introduced in the main hallway and the small original library will be altered to provide a connection between the historic building and the new addition.

More extensive alterations are proposed in the secondary and less ornate basement level but the program will remain mostly the same as was previously approved on this level as well. Approximately half of the spaces will be restored for classroom use while the remaining areas will be adapted for utility and restroom purposes. Additional light will also be provided by introducing seven small new window wells and lowering the sills of the existing windows.

No changes to the previously approved exterior treatments are proposed. The pebbledash finish will be restored, the existing asphalt shingle roof will be replaced with standing seam metal and the original front portico will be reconstructed based upon historical plans and photographs.

Proposed Addition

The most significant revision to the previously approved concept is the reduction in size and scale of the proposed addition. Originally, the new construction was to house twice as many classrooms, a community/multipurpose room and restroom facilities but these uses have been eliminated so that the new building will be reduced from 24,600 sq. ft. to 10,300 sq. ft.

One of the most notable results of this reduction is that the visual impact of the new construction has been significantly lessened. For example, the community/multipurpose room wing of the new addition was originally proposed to extend to the north of Reno so that it would have been visible from the historic school's primary façade. But the revised scheme situates nearly all of the smaller new addition directly behind (west of) the historic school so that the connecting link to the adjacent Alice Deal Middle School gymnasium will be the only new element that will be visible from the front of Reno. However, this connector will be only minimally visible since it will be glazed and set back far behind the historic school in the previously approved location.

Otherwise, the general massing, exterior materials and other design details for the new construction are very similar to those that were previously approved by the Board. If anything, a more generous use of glazed surfaces will make the addition appear even lighter and less intrusive than before.

Evaluation

The net effect of the revised concept design is that the historic appearance and prominence of the historic Reno School and its setting will be maintained more intact than in the previously approved plans. As such, the revised concept is fully compatible with the historic significance of this important landmark building.

Archaeological survey has not been conducted on Square 1759, the Jesse Reno School property. The area would have been favorable for human occupation in the prehistoric, contact, and historic periods, and remains from all periods are expected where subsequent development has not caused a loss of resources. Civil War-related archaeological resources including Fort Reno itself, earthworks, gun emplacements, camps, and ditches as well as sites related to early farms and plantations may also be present. Following the November, 2011 HRPB hearing, the project development team contacted the City Archaeologist to consult regarding the need for archaeological survey. As of February 15, 2012 three responses to a RFP for a survey that includes geoarchaeological testing had been received. A work plan must be submitted for review before the survey can start, and one has not yet been received.

Recommendation

Staff recommends that the Board approve of the revised conceptual design for the proposed new addition and delegate the remaining restoration and design review to the staff.